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Bronson's still photographs of the motorcade were crisp and clear — except for this picture which was taken as the first shot was fired. The sound made Bronson jump and

blurred the images. The "umbrella man" was in action (arrow) as the bubble-top limousine began to pass by the gassy knoll and Bronson changed positions.

Lens error caught images

By KENT RUFFLE
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ADA, Okla. — Charles L. Bronson, a 40-year-old smallinger, has been a photographer for as long as he can remember.

But it was a mistake he made with a movie camera on Nov. 22, 1963, that may make him famous.

The chief engineer for Gash Tool Co., a rock drilling bit manufacturing company in Ada, recalls that he had equipped himself with a 35 millimeter Leica Model job still camera and an 8 millimeter Keynote movie camera.

"I thought I was using the telephone lens on the movie camera. But that camera had both a wide-angle lens and a telephone lens. They were both long lenses. I hadn't had the camera very long and I wasn't too familiar with the two lenses. So I used the wide-angle lens rather than the telephone lens. I'd intended to use it."

Because he used the wide-angle lens, his obscured footage of an ambulance picking up an epileptic victim an estimated five minutes before the presidential ambush included the top of the frame of the window from which a sniper would fire on President John F. Kennedy. Had he used the telephone lens, he says, the window wouldn't have been included in the frame.

Bronson says he used to print and enlarge pictures by the hour back in his hometown of Centralia, Ill.

"My mother (the late Mrs. Edith Bronson) worked in a photographic studio. She had an old German Brownie and I used to help out around the studio."

The son of a coal miner, the late Albert Bronson, the young Bronson attended Greenville College (where he was photographer for the yearbook), and Bradley University in Peoria, Ill. Graduating with a double major in chemistry and math, Bronson, a 120-pound, 5-foot-7 man whose blond hair is turning gray, began a series of anti-forgery jobs that included work for the LaPorte Co. in Longview before

he moved to Dallas in 1958 and took a position with Varel Manufacturing Co., a rock bit maker, where he rose to vice president of research and development. He moved to Ada in 1970.

Bronson wasn't a JPM fan ("I didn't vote for him") but he recalls seeing the motorcade route published in the newspaper before the president's visit. "I told Françoise (his 36-year-old wife) at the breakfast table that day: 'You know, I've never seen a president. This would be a good opportunity. How about meeting me at noon and we'll go see him.'"

"We met in the parking lot behind the trials stadium about 12:15 p.m. and walked toward Elm and Houston. I stood on an overhang of the colonnade to get a better view. It was an elevation of 55 or 60 inches."

"When I shot the ambulance picking up the patient, I had no idea that I even had the window in the school book depository building."

Bronson switched from movie camera to still camera on recording the motorcade. All his Leica shots are crisp and clear with the exception of one that is blurred because he jumped when the first shot was fired.

Bronson almost immediately resumed filming with his movie camera and caught six or seven seconds of the assassination including the second shot striking the president's head.

"Someday I got to thinking that I might have some pictures that would show something. So I just wrote a little note with the film and dropped it all in that slot at Eastman's. You know where you drop it in beside the Eastman processing plant on Main Way. It wasn't too far from where I worked."

"So I just dropped the film in the slot to see how footage and included a note telling them that I had some pictures of the assassination and thought I might have something I asked if it might be possible for them to expedite the processing."

About 3 p.m. Monday, I got a call from FBI Special Agent Walter Hunt. He

told me he had received the note and the film. He said they'd do everything they could to speed up the processing."

Before the week ended Bronson was viewing the results at the Eastman processing plant with two FBI agents who studied the pictures.

Bronson's movie film appears a bit jerky because, in an attempt to conserve film, he had reduced the camera's speed from 18 frames to 12 frames per second. He caught about six or seven seconds of the assassination.

Bronson recalls that the FBI agents who sat in on the projection were primarily interested in the assassination sequence and not the earlier sequence on the ambulance call.

"I didn't even notice that window the first time I saw it," he said.

In fact, Bronson thought nothing more about the window in that sequence until he was approached a couple of weeks ago by Earl Galt, reporter for The News.

Even after Galt succeeded in having the movie film enlarged and enhanced, Bronson and his son were when he was seeing "It is not real life."

Did he see movement in the window in the enlarged version?

"It was pointed out to me."

Bronson has since given the 1988 Leica to a daughter at a sort of bequest. "The movie camera, now in 1981, was given to a brother."

Bronson was moved by the events of that day that he wrote a letter and copied it for all seven of his sisters. The letter describes the horror of the day's events and his emotional reaction.

Bronson and his wife are deeply religious in a growth of carefully trained shrubs in front of their rocky brick house on a quiet street in Ada is a small sign.

"The kind of the sun for pardon, the song of the birds for mirth, one is nearer God's heart in a garden — than anywhere else on earth."

Of his shot of the window, Bronson said, "It was presidential."